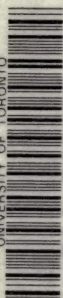


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POEMS
OF LOVE AND EARTH

POEMS OF LOVE AND EARTH

BY

JOHN DRINKWATER

AUTHOR OF 'LYRICAL AND OTHER POEMS' 'POEMS OF MEN AND HOURS'
'GOPHETUA' ETC.

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POEMS

OF LOVE AND EARLY

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Country Life ; The Englishwoman ; The Nation ;
The Poetry Review ; The Spectator ; The West-
minster Gazette ; and The Windsor Magazine.

DEDICATION

TO MY WIFE

*My words are here of immemorial things,
The labouring earth, the swift unwearied wings
Of Love that ever circle earth about,
Pity for stricken men and pride that they
Yet look with eyes heroic on the day,
Creators in the void and lords of doubt ;*

*Of women who, albeit nursing yet
Remembrance of the things we would forget,
Spoiled of so much, so little paid in fee,
Keep bright in wonder and in worship still
The hearts of men so troubled to fulfil,
Not wholly shamed, the end that is to be.*

*Of secret exultations of the year,
Fierce inarticulate passions that are near
In ecstasy to God's imagining,
Of men who wake each day as to a proud
Adventure, and go down to sleep unbowed,
To dream alone of what the dawn may bring.*

*My words of these. And of my age what word ?
Are not of these the ultimate longings heard
Upon the lips of every storied age ?
What little vision may be mine of these
Is clear or clouded as my day decrees,
The time's my tutor, and my song the wage.*

*And you, my Lady, to whose lap I bring
This little treasure of my voyaging,
Of you I take how much, of how great worth—
Of your hands healing, peace of your good care,
Of your hope strength all perilous things to dare,
And fellowship in you with Love and Earth.*

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VIGIL

I watch the good ships on the sea
Yet never ship comes home to me.

Out of the crowded ports they sail
To crowded ports that cry them hail.

And still they bring no word to me,
Tall masted ships upon the sea.

As goodly messengers they go
Laughing against all winds that blow.

Yet never ship upon the sea
Bears blessed merchandise for me.

I watch them pass from friend to friend
All day from world's end to world's end.

No pleasant ship comes down to me
Along the long leagues of the sea.

Nor sign nor salutation made,
Beyond the far sea-line they fade.

Yet as I watch them on the sea
All ships are piloted by me.

WED

I married him on Christmas morn,—
Ah woe betide, ah woe betide,
Folk said I was a comely bride,—
Ah me forlorn.

All braided was my golden hair,
And heavy then, and shining then,
My limbs were sweet to madden men,—
O cunning snare.

My beauty was a thing they say
Of large renown,—O dread renown,—
Its rumour travelled through the town,
Alas the day.

His kisses burn my mouth and brows,—
O burning kiss, O barren kiss,—
My body for his worship is,
And so he vows.

But daily many men draw near
With courtly speech and subtle speech ;
I gather from the lips of each
A deadly fear.

As he grows sullen I grow cold,
And whose the blame? Not mine the blame;
Their passions round me as a flame
All fiercely fold.

And oh, to think, that he might be
So proudly set, above them set,
If he might but awaken yet
The soul of me.

Will no man seek and seeking find
The soul of me, the soul of me? -
Nay, even as they are, so is he,
And all are blind.

On Christmas morning we were wed,
Ah me the morn, the luckless morn;
Now poppies burn along the corn,
Would I were dead.

THE WEAVING

When God so marvellously wrought
In chaos with a poet's care,
Think you He then had any thought
Of golden hair ?

Of lips to break the bars of sleep
Was He aware when He designed
The changing wonders of the deep,
The minstrel wind ?

Foresaw He, when He made the skies
And rivers running to the sea,
The shadowed laughter of those eyes
That beacon me ?

Had any rumour reached Him yet
Of love's compassion in the night
Upon that day when first He set
In darkness light ?

'Twas so. When stars and waters swept
New-born along the waste, and man
In God's high meditation slept,
Our love began.

UNCROWNED

She drew the patterned curtains back
And let the moonlight in
And the cool night. There was no lack
Of lures that lead to sin
About her grey eyes tenanted
By secret laughter proud,
Her ripe lips were a miracle,
Her hair fell as a cloud
About her shoulders, and she stood
Most beautiful, a flame
Of passion tortured in the winds,
Her womanhood a shame,
Her beauty burning as a wound,
Her love a thing of blame.

A loathed thing her love it seemed,
For ill her love had grown
As rotting fruit beneath the boughs
Among the grass unmown,
Beautiful once in sun and rain
And good winds cheerly blown.

Men came, a courtly crowd to her,
And spoke of love aloud to her,
Day-long, day-long, they flattered her,
And called her beauty good,

But no man came with secret flame
To cover her and lend her name
A glory that should leaven all
Her holy womanhood—
Her hungry womanhood.

She watched the other women go
With quiet mates, the women so
Far set below her in the things
That make a woman fair.
And now she leant across the night,
Breast open to the soft moonlight,
And silver arrows of the moon
Were splintered in her hair.

' O God of all the yellow fields
Of stubble, God of stars,
Why should the woman that is me
Be prisoned in the bars
Fashioned by men because their eyes
Are sealed, their sweet souls dead—
Why should my armoured pride so make
Uncomraded my bed ?

' For that my beauty is a thing
To make a proven tale,
My speech to keep tired lids awake,
My laughter like a sail
Rippled upon a golden sea,
My wit a thing of worth,

They make a common troll of me,
God of the good green earth !

' My name is heard throughout the land,
Men sing my body's praise,
They listen when I laugh, my words
Are coveted, my days
Are rich in tribute, yet I find
No man that dares to be
Lord of the secret heart I bear,
The woman that is me.

' How shall I speak ? How, being proud,
Shall I cry out that this
Woman they praise is hungering
For one unfettered kiss,
That she they make a song-burden
Is starving while they sing,
Starving among them all, O God,
How shall I cry this thing ?

' Hidden within my body's flame
And flames which are my soul
A secret beauty lies. Until
One rides to make it whole,
To set it on his brow, to make
It free yet never free,
Crying for birth goes wandering
The woman that is me.

' And while I wait I have no joy
Of homage nor the things
That make the seasons beautiful,
And folded are the wings
Whereon—ah well, night moves apace,
Anew the dawn-tide runs,—
Day and the little light that is
The shadow of Thy suns.'

She curtained out the moonlight, pale
In marriage with the day.
As golden nets her golden hair
Along the pillows lay ;
And the wind stirred among the leaves,
And God's work went its way.

PETRUCCIA'S SONG

About the middle of the year—

Whistle, whistle, bird in tree,

When the skies were very clear—

Pipe a song for me,

Came a lover up the hill,

Came a lover with a will.

Sing a dirge for me.

Tinkers now may tell the tale—

Hush, oh silly sobbing wind,

Gossips gathered round their ale—

Hush, it is unkind,

Men must laugh whate'er the cost,

Never mind the life that's lost,

Hush, now, never mind.

A BALLAD OF KINGS

An old king once was proud of his kingdom,
Proud of his own as a king might be,
And he saw a hundred ships come sailing
Out of a kingdom over the sea,
And he knew that the king that they bore with
 them
Was a mightier man of war than he.

As the ships came up through the summer weather
The great king stood in the bows of one
Red-sailed and carven and golden coloured,
His silver shield was alight in the sun,
And he held in his hand a spear long-shafted,
Scarred by the battling he had done.

Then a man went down to the edge of the waters
And cried, ' My master will give to-day
Into your hands a mighty treasure,
So be it ye tarry not on your way.'
And the great king laughed and gave no answer,
And the ships came sailing into the bay.

The old king spake to his queen, whose beauty
And young desire he scarce could tell,
'Wherein is succour in this our peril?'

And the young queen answered, 'It were not
well

For the weak to anger the proud in battle,
Go down and meet him and bid him dwell

With us in peace for a little season,
And offer to give what he would take,
And then to-night in the hour of music
I'll crave a blessing, and bid him make
No sound of grieving in this our kingdom,
But seek his homeland for my fair sake.'

.

No longer now is the sound of feasting,
The hall is hushed in the hour of song,
And the song is ended, and now the silence
Breaks, 'O king, your hand is strong,
And mine is weak, and I crave a blessing—
Go from us and leave no stain of wrong.'

Then the great king rose and looked on her
beauty,

And said, 'On the morrow we will go
With sheathed swords and nought of treasure,
Save thee alone—will ye have it so?
Speak, O king, and men of this kingdom,
Shall it be as I now have said or no?'

The proud old king was proud of his kingdom,
But prouder far of his queen was he,—
'Not for you and your spears uplifted,
And mailed men shall this thing be,
Our pride is little for things that perish,
But little of love for shame have we.'

Then the great king rose and his men rose with
him
And bound the men of the old king there,
But the proud old king and his queen they bound
not,
And they sat and watched with their swords
laid bare
Across their knees, and no word was spoken
Till the day on the land and sea was fair.

.
A hundred ships in the golden morning
With great sails gleaming took the tide,
And one all carven and golden coloured
Bore the king who laughed in his pride,
For the queen in all her perilous beauty,
Flushed, exultant, stood at his side.

The old king stood at the edge of the waters
And watched the ships go down the bay,
And his pride was dead, and his heart was broken,
For carried along the windy way
He heard the sound of a woman's laughter,
Light as the blossom that's blown in May.

FORSAKEN

The word is said, and I no more shall know
Aught of the changing story of her days,
Nor any treasure that her lips bestow.

And I, who loving her was wont to praise
All things in love, now reft of music go
With silent step down unfrequented ways.

My soul is like a lonely market-place
Where late were laughing folk and shining steeds,
And many things of comeliness and grace ;

And now between the stones are twisting weeds,
No sound there is, nor any friendly face,
Save for a bedesman telling o'er his beads.

OF THREE

He met us by the twilit sea,
My love and me, my love and me,
A very cunning man was he.

There was no sound of men ; the fall
Of the long fretful waves, the call
Of amorous sea birds—that was all.

Our love no gust of grief had known,
No little shadowy doubt had grown
Between the kisses that alone

Her lips and mine, it seemed to us,
Of all the world could fashion thus
So pure albeit perilous.

Triumphant was our love, and free
Of all the spears of jealousy.
A very cunning man was he.

.

Bereft of love, bereft of light,
Bereft of solace in the night,
I keep alone my battle-might.

The travelling men from many climes
No rumour ever brought or rhymes
Of prouder beauty, sweeter chimes

Of laughter, than the beauty set
About her brows, the laughters met
About her lips. I shall forget.

Her love, God knows her love is less
No whit, no colder her caress,
But alien love her lips confess,

Not mine, not mine, no longer mine ;
All passionate yet her dark eyes shine,
But unto me they bear no sign.

I have no care of heaven or hell ;
I wait his coming ; it is well.
And after—after, who may tell ?

DERELICT

The cloudy peril of the seas,
The menace of mid-winter days,
May break the scented boughs of ease
And lock the lips of praise,
But every sea its harbour knows,
And every winter wakes to spring,
And every broken song the rose
Shall yet re-sing.

But comfortable love once spent
May not re-shape its broken trust,
Or find anew the old content,
Dishonoured in the dust ;
No port awaits those tattered sails,
No sun rides high above that gloom,
Unchronicled those half-told tales
Shall time entomb.

THE ROSES OF BETHLEHEM

In Bethlehem where the Lord was born
In a lowly place on a starlit morn,

By a full fair church at the city walls
Is a field where still in the starlight falls

An odour of roses sweet and rare,
Albeit no rose now blossoms there.

For there was fashioned of God's kind hand
The first of roses in any land.

And in this manner he fashioned these,
The red rose trees and the white rose trees.

A little maiden was held in shame
For a sin whereof she had no blame.

And they led her out in her nakedness
To die in that field by the fire's caress.

And as they kindled the fire she prayed
To the Lord that he would help a maid,

And let all men see that she had done
No wrong in her days beneath the sun.

And praying so of her sore desire
She gathered her sweet limbs to the fire.

And the Lord God heard her in that place,
And quenched the fire of His holy grace.

And the brands whereon the flames had fed
Clung round her body, roses red.

And out of the brands unkindled quite
Brake round her a foam of roses white.

So in the City of Bethlehem
Where the Lord was born of David's stem,

It pleased the Maker to fashion these,
The red rose trees and the white rose trees.

THE CROWNING OF DREAMING JOHN

I

*Seven days he travelled
 Down the roads of England,
 Out of leafy Warwick lanes
 Into London Town.
 Grey and very wrinkled
 Was Dreaming John of Grafton,
 But seven days he walked to see
 A king put on his crown.*

*Down the streets of London
 He asked the crowded people
 Where would be the crowning
 And when would it begin.
 He said he'd got a shilling,
 A shining silver shilling,
 But when he came to Westminster
 They wouldn't let him in.*

*Dreaming John of Grafton
 Looked upon the people,
 Laughed a little laugh, and then
 Whistled and was gone.
 Out along the long roads,
 The twisting roads of England,
 Back into the Warwick lanes
 Wandered Dreaming John.*

II

As twilight touched with her ghostly fingers
All the meadows and mellow hills,
And the great sun swept in his robes of glory—
Woven of petals of daffodils
And jewelled and fringed with leaves of the roses—
Down the plains of the western way,
Among the rows of the scented clover
Dreaming John in his dreaming lay.

Since dawn had folded the stars of heaven
He'd counted a score of miles and five,
And now, with a vagabond heart untroubled
And proud as the properest man alive,
He sat him down with a limber spirit
That all men covet and few may keep,
And he watched the summer draw round her
 beauty
The shadow that fell from the wings of sleep.

And up from the valleys and shining rivers,
And out of the shadowy wood-ways wild,
And down from the secret hills, and streaming
Out of the shimmering undefiled
Wonder of sky that arched him over,
Came a company shod in gold
And girt in gowns of a thousand blossoms,
Laughing and rainbow-aureoled.

Wrinkled and grey and with eyes a-wonder
And soul beatified, Dreaming John
Watched the marvellous company gather
While over the clover a glory shone ;
They bore on their brows the hues of heaven,
Their limbs were sweet with flowers of the fields,
And their feet were bright with the gleaming
treasure
That prodigal earth to her children yields.

They stood before him, and John was laughing
As they were laughing ; he knew them all,
Spirits of trees and pools and meadows,
Mountain and windy waterfall,
Spirits of clouds and skies and rivers,
Leaves and shadows and rain and sun,
A crowded, jostling, laughing army,
And Dreaming John knew every one.

Among them then was a sound of singing
And chiming music, as one came down
The level rows of the scented clover,
Bearing aloft a flashing crown ;
No word of a man's desert was spoken,
Nor any word of a man's unworth,
But there on the wrinkled brow it rested,
And Dreaming John was king of the earth.

III

*Dreaming John of Grafton
Went away to London,
Saw the coloured banners fly,
Heard the great bells ring,
But though his tongue was civil
And he had a silver shilling,
They wouldn't let him in to see
The crowning of the King.*

*So back along the long roads,
The leafy roads of England,
Dreaming John went carolling
Travelling alone,
And in a summer evening,
Among the scented clover,
He held before a shouting throng
A crowning of his own.*

THE TRAVELLER

When March was master of furrow and fold,
And the skies kept cloudy festival,
And the daffodil pods were tipped with gold
And a passion was in the plover's call,
A spare old man went hobbling by
With a broken pipe and a tapping stick,
And he mumbled—' Blossom before I die,
Be quick, you little brown buds, be quick.

' I've weathered the world for a count of years—
Good old years of shining fire—
And death and the devil bring no fears,
And I've fed the flame of my last desire ;
I'm ready to go, but I'd pass the gate
On the edge of the world with an old heart sick
If I missed the blossoms. I may not wait—
The gate is open—be quick, be quick.'

THE VAGABOND

I know the pools where the grayling rise,
I know the trees where the filberts fall,
I know the woods where the red fox lies,
The twisted elms where the brown owls call.
And I've seldom a shilling to call my own,
And there's never a girl I'd marry,
I thank the Lord I'm a rolling stone
With never a care to carry.

I talk to the stars as they come and go
On every night from July to June,
I'm free of the speech of the winds that blow,
And I know what weather will sing what tune.
I sow no seed and I pay no rent,
And I thank no man for his bounties,
But I've a treasure that's never spent,
I'm lord of a dozen counties.

THE FECKENHAM MEN

The jolly men at Feckenham
Don't count their goods as common men,
Their heads are full of silly dreams
From half-past ten to half-past ten,
They'll tell you why the stars are bright,
And some sheep black and some sheep white.

The jolly men at Feckenham
Draw wages of the sun and rain,
And count as good as golden coin
The blossoms on the window pane,
And Lord! they love a sinewy tale
Told over pots of foaming ale.

Now here's a tale of Feckenham
Told to me by a Feckenham man,
Who, being only eighty years,
Ran always when the red fox ran,
And looked upon the earth with eyes
As quiet as unclouded skies.

These jolly men of Feckenham
One day when summer strode in power
Went down, it seems, among their lands
And saw their bean fields all in flower—
'Wheat-ricks,' they said, 'be good to see,
What would a rick of blossoms be?'

So straight they brought the sickles out
And worked all day till day was done,
And builded them a good square rick
Of scented bloom beneath the sun.
And was not this I tell to you
A fiery-hearted thing to do?

NEWS OF THE FLEET

(NOTE.—My acknowledgments are due to Mr. E. Hallam Moorhouse's admirable collection of 'Letters of the English Seamen.'))

I

Peace, aye peace, no more do we ask of God,
And the Lord shall not be heedless of our desire,
But peace uncrowned of honour is but a rod,
And a fearful peace consumes as a wasting fire.

From France are rumours of friends that are
haply foes,
And far in the north are lips that laugh at
our pain,
And here at our gates the muttering menace
grows—
The whisper gathers—' They bow to the dogs
of Spain.'

They lie, and they know they lie, but we play the
fool,
My Master, the high God loves not this delay,
Shall our guns be mute from the break o' the
year to Yule,
And we stand mammering still from day to day ?

We pray to the Lord for peace, and the voice of
the Lord

Is heard—'Go forth and harvest your peace
with might.'

A word, my Master, we beg but the grace of a word
That our ships may cover the seas with terrible
light.

*John Hawkins, in love of the Queen and hope of
heaven,*

*Sent in fifteen hundred and eighty-seven
From the Bonaventure, riding the homeland seas,
To Sir Francis Walsingham these.*

II

The crowded sails of Spain are set
For Englishmen to see,
And Spain, we mind us, shall forget
The day not easily,
The men of Spain shall rue it yet
What men the English be.

God grant you watch in such a sort
As Parma's pride may ease,
We've one who ere to-day's report
Goes shouldering the seas
Shall wish himself in Mary Port
Among his orange trees.

Haste, haste, and pardon for the haste,—
The eyes of England wake,
But little hours in sleep we waste
And Spain is still to break,
We've dealings little to her taste—
Yours ever, Francis Drake.

*Fifteen hundred and eighty-eight,
The last of July, these to the State,
In the fear of God and in scorn of fate.*

III

Nine days ago we fell,
For that heaven thought it well,
In the shadows of the dawn
On the strength of Philip drawn
In a mighty pretty show off Gravelines,
And we set our teeth and came
With a thunder and a flame
On the men who curse the name
Of England's Queen.

We held them all the day,
And goodly ships were they,
And three we sent below
While some were fain to go
To the coast as being weary of the sea,

And the rest were well content
To leave our merriment,
And along the wind they went
By God's decree.

To the north and to the north
We sent the Spaniard forth,
And they fled us with a will
While we followed laughing still
For we'd neither shot nor powder to our name,
And we drove them from the coast,
And it's little now they'll boast
Who had sworn to make a ghost
Of England's fame.

*From aboard the Ark, in August of eighty-eight
And the seventh day, with a humble heart and great
Thanksgiving to God, to whom be praise that an end
Of this our work is made as may here be seen,
To Francis Walsingham this, from his loving friend
Howard, Admiral, liege to his sovereign Queen.*

TWO ELEGIES

I

Tolstoi

(1828-1910)

Not out of his due time he moves among
The immemorial silences of death,
The golden ears were full, the song was sung,
And the prophetic breath

Had prophesied unto a world not wise
Through a full tale of changing fiery days,
And vision was no longer to his eyes
Of earth's tumultuous ways.

His heart had striven long, his feet had pressed
Adown the paths where many sorrows meet,
Till the great heart was troubled in its quest,
And tired the travelling feet.

His lips have spoken, and his lips are sealed,
But we shall pluck the fruits of his desire
In days to be when broken love is healed,
And hearts are forged in fire.

II

Florence Nightingale

(1820-1910)

Sweet lady of the healing hands, go down
To laurelled peace from days that knew no
dread,
Your meed on earth love-sentinelled renown,
Elsewhere communion with the ageless dead.

To those far fields your soul is drawn again
Wherein the lord of pity fashioneth
The charity whereof you brought to men
Meek ministrations in the ways of death.

No tears we bring ; only a quickened sense
That man, albeit troubled of his scars,
May bear him like a god for recompense,
And set his forehead to the flaming stars.

PIERROT

*Pierrot alone,
And then Pierrette,
And then a story to forget.*

Pierrot alone.

Pierrette among the apple boughs
Come down and take a Pierrot's kiss,
The moon is white upon your brows,
Pierrette among the apple boughs,
Your lips are cold, and I would set
A rose upon your lips, Pierrette,
A rosy kiss,
Pierrette, Pierrette.

And then Pierrette.

I've left my apple boughs, Pierrot,
A shadow now is on my face,
But still my lips are cold, and O
No rose is on my lips, Pierrot,
You laugh, and then you pass away
Among the scented leaves of May,
And on my face
The shadows stay.

And then a story to forget.

The petals fall upon the grass,
And I am crying in the dark,
The clouds above the white moon pass—
My tears are falling on the grass;
Pierrot, Pierrot, I heard your vows
And left my blossomed apple boughs,
And sorrows dark
Are on my brows.

THE DUSTMAN'S SONG

For a Fairy Play

Along the pathways of the skies,
From star to star, from moon to moon,
Where silver blossoms slenderwise
Lie all about the woven boon
Of shadows fallen from the sun,
I pass alone when day is done.

I gather in the pollen shed
From silver cups and petals white,
And back to earth, all swiftly sped,
I bear my treasure down the night.
In little golden sacks I keep
The powdered silver dust of sleep.

Dust for mortal eyes and dust
Gathered for the fairy folk,
In my magic shuttle thrust
To and fro with level stroke,
Through the loom of seeming sooth,
Weaving ageless dreams of truth.

EARTH LOVE

If there should be a sound of song
Among the leaves when I am dead,
God grant I still may hear it sped.

And may I never pass along
Unmoved of that sweet goodlihead,
*If there should be a sound of song
Among the leaves when I am dead.*

And may I never know the wrong
Of cancelled memory of shed
Soft petals of the roses red—
*If there should be a sound of song
Among the leaves when I am dead,
God grant I still may hear it sped.*

MORNING THANKSGIVING

Thank God for sleep in the long quiet night,
For the clear day calling through the little
 leaded panes,
For the shining well-water and the warm golden
 light,
And the paths washed white by singing rains.

We thank Thee, O God, for exultation born
Of the kiss of Thy winds, for life among the
 leaves,
For the whirring wings that pass about the wonder
 of the morn,
For the changing plumes of swallows gliding
 upwards to their eaves.

For the treasure of the garden, the gillyflowers of
 gold,
The prouder petalled tulips, the primrose full
 of spring,
For the crowded orchard boughs, and the swelling
 buds that hold
A yet unwoven wonder, to Thee our praise
 we bring.

Thank God for good bread, for the honey in the
comb,

For the brown-shelled eggs, for the clustered
blossoms set

Beyond the open window in a pink and cloudy
foam,

For the laughing loves among the branches met.

For the kind-faced women we bring our thanks
to Thee,

With shapely mothering arms and grave eyes
clear and blithe,

For the tall young men, strong-thewed as men
may be,

For the old man bent above his scythe.

For the great glad earth, for heaven's trackless
ways,

For their music and their colour, Lord, we bring
What things may be of thanks, and that Thou
hast lent our days

Eyes to see and ears to hear and lips to sing.

MALVERN LYRICS

(To Mary Anderson de Navarro)

I

Cool where the clean winds travel
Along the solemn hills,
We watch the flowing splendour
That summer brews and spills
From Malvern down to Bredon
Across the mellow plain,
Transfiguring the lowlands
Of shining leaves and grain.

Above the black pine-shadows
We dream beneath the sky,
And watch the far-flung valleys
Of Severn and of Wye,
And see the white clouds, walking
The great blue road that spans
The world from Wales to Cotswold,
Like ghostly caravans.

From beacon on to beacon,
From shire to burning shire.
The full day flames triumphant
All girt in golden fire,

And here above the meadows
Fire garmented and shod,
We find a little haven
Among the winds of God.

II

High up among the stars
We woo the night,
Yea, we who bear the scars
Of armed fight
In the great world below
Where men in traffic go.

Here in the ancient hills
Is ancient calm,
Here God's wing broods, and fills
With shadowed balm
The hearts of men who know
The ways that trouble so.

Here let us fold our hands
In prayer and praise,
Here in the silent lands—
The quiet ways,
Here holy vigil keep,
Hosted by stars and sleep

III

Surely God laughs a little when He hears
The wind spun into music on the crest
Of hills that change not with the changing years—
I know He laughs, for laughter likes Him best.

Surely God laughs a little when He sees
The shepherds in the valleys fold their sheep,
And the long shadows falling from the trees
Over the corn full-eared for men to reap.

And well He laughs in thinking of the pride
Of your good beauty waxing day by day,
In the white fires of time but purified,
A perfect summer mellowed out of May.

AT GRAFTON

God laughed when he made Grafton
That's under Bredon Hill,
A jewel in a jewelled plain.
The seasons work their will
On golden thatch and crumbling stone,
And every soft-lipped breeze
Makes music for the Grafton men
In comfortable trees.

God's beauty over Grafton
Stole into roof and wall,
And hallowed every paved path
And every lowly stall,
And to a woven wonder
Conspired with one accord
The labour of the servant,
The labour of the Lord.

And momentarily to Grafton
Comes in from vale and wold
The sound of sheep unshepherded,
The sound of sheep in fold,
And, blown along the bases
Of lands that set their wide
Frank brows to God, comes chanting
The breath of Bristol tide.

The days are good at Grafton,
The golden days and grey,
The busy clouds, the mellow barns,
And every winding way.
And oh, the peace of Grafton
Beneath the starlit skies,
God dreamt of when he fashioned
A woman's love-lit eyes.

A GARDEN IN KENT

The cool wind falls from the long low hills
 Into this quiet corner of Kent,
Into this garden of roses and fills
 The passionate hours with a sweet content,
It gathers the scent of the clustered pinks
 And shakes the pods of the lupin spires,
To the heart of the yellow gorse it sinks
 And fans the peony's paling fires.

No rumour is here of London ways,
 And London city is hard at hand,
Unstirred the calm processional days
 Foster the fruits of the mellow land,
And the garden nothing of trouble knows
 Set round by bountiful guardian trees,
For here the lord of the world bestows
 His largesse of imperial ease.

The storied wisdom of all the years
 When, travel-weary, our pride is spent
May nothing avail, but the trouble clears
 Here in this coloured corner of Kent ;
The pity of man is little enough
 But great is the pity of God who gives
A little haven a man may love
 And hold in purity while he lives.

A WARWICKSHIRE SONG

There are no oaks in all the shires
I love so well as those that spill
Smooth acorns from their mailed cups
Along the Warwick lanes ; and still
The Avon holds as clear a way
As Tweed or Thames, and never blows
The wind along a sweeter land
Than that wheredown the Avon goes.

On northern hill and Sussex down,
In Derby dale and Lincoln fen,
I've trafficked with the winds of God
And talked and laughed with many men ;
I've seen the ploughshare break the earth
From Cumberland to woody Kent ;
I've followed Severn to the sea,
And heard the swollen tide of Trent.

I know the south, I know the north,
I've walked the counties up and down,
I've seen the ships go round the coast
From Mersey dock to London town ;
I've seen the spires of east and west,
And sung for joy of what I've seen,
But oh, my heart is ever fain
Of ways where Avon's oaks are green.

ROUNDELS OF THE YEAR

*I caught the changes of the year
In soft and fragile nets of song,
For you to whom my days belong.*

*For you to whom each day is dear
Of all the high processional throng,
I caught the changes of the year
In soft and fragile nets of song.*

*And here some sound of beauty, here
Some note of ancient, ageless wrong
Re-shaping as my lips were strong
I caught the changes of the year
In soft and fragile nets of song,
For you to whom my days belong.*

I

The spring is passing through the land
In web of ghostly green arrayed,
And blood is warm in man and maid.

The arches of desire have spanned
The barren ways, the debt is paid,
The spring is passing through the land
In web of ghostly green arrayed.

Sweet scents along the winds are fanned
From shadowy wood and secret glade
Where beauty blossoms unafraid.
The spring is passing through the land
In web of ghostly green arrayed,
And blood is warm in man and maid.

II

Proud insolent June with burning lips
Holds riot now from sea to sea,
And shod in sovran gold is she.

To the full flood of reaping slips
The seeding-tide by God's decree,
Proud insolent June with burning lips
Holds riot now from sea to sea.

And all the goodly fellowships
Of bird and bloom and beast and tree
Are gallant of her company—
Proud insolent June with burning lips
Holds riot now from sea to sea,
And shod in sovran gold is she.

III

The loaded sheaves are harvested,
The sheep are in the stubbled fold,
The tale of labour crowned is told.

The wizard of the year has spread
A glory over wood and wold,
The loaded sheaves are harvested,
The sheep are in the stubbled fold.

The yellow apples and the red
Bear down the boughs, the hazels hold
No more their fruit in cups of gold.
The loaded sheaves are harvested,
The sheep are in the stubbled fold
The tale of labour crowned is told.

IV

The year is lapsing into time
Along a deep and songless gloom,
Unchapleted of leaf or bloom.

And mute between the dusk and prime
The diligent earth re-sets her loom,—
The year is lapsing into time
Along a deep and songless gloom.

While o'er the snows the seasons chime
Their golden hopes to re-illumine
The brief eclipse about the tomb,
The year is lapsing into time
Along a deep and songless gloom,
Unchapleted of leaf or bloom.

*Not wise as cunning scholars are,
With curious words upon your tongue,
Are you for whom my song is sung.*

*But you are wise of cloud and star,
And winds and boughs all blossom-hung,
Not wise as cunning scholars are,
With curious words upon your tongue.*

*Surely, clear child of earth, some far
Dim Dryad-haunted groves among,
Your lips to lips of knowledge clung—
Not wise as cunning scholars are,
With curious words upon your tongue,
Are you for whom my song is sung.*

THE FIRES OF GOD

I

Time gathers to my name ;
Along the ways wheredown my feet have passed
I see the years with little triumph crowned,
Exulting not for perils dared, downcast
And weary-eyed and desolate for shame
Of having been unstirred of all the sound
Of the deep music of the men that move
Through the world's days in suffering and love.

Poor barren years that brooded over-much
On your own burden, pale and stricken years—
Go down to your oblivion, we part
With no reproach or ceremonial tears.
Henceforth my hands are lifted to the touch
Of hands that labour with me, and my heart
Hereafter to the world's heart shall be set
And its own pain forget.

Time gathers to my name—
Days dead are dark ; the days to be, a flame
Of wonder and of promise, and great cries
Of travelling people reach me—I must rise.

II

Was I not man? Could I not rise alone
Above the shifting of the things that be,
Rise to the crest of all the stars and see
The ways of all the world as from a throne?
Was I not man, with proud imperial will
To cancel all the secrets of high heaven?
Should not my sole unbridled purpose fill
All hidden paths with light when once was riven
God's veil by my indomitable will?

So dreamt I, little man of little vision,
Great only in unconsecrated pride;
Man's pity grew from pity to derision,
And still I thought, 'Albeit they deride,
Yet is it mine uncharted ways to dare
Unknown to these,
And they shall stumble darkly, unaware
Of solemn mysteries
Whereof the key is mine alone to bear.'

So I forgot my God, and I forgot
The holy sweet communion of men,
And moved in desolate places, where are not
Meek hands held out with patient healing when
The hours are heavy with uncharitable pain;

No company but vain
And arrogant thoughts were with me at my side.
And ever to myself I lied,
Saying 'Apart from all men thus I go
To know the things that they may never know.'

III

Then a great change befell :
Long time I stood
In witless hardihood
With eyes on one sole changeless vision set—
The deep disturbed fret
Of men who made brief tarrying in hell
On their earth travelling.
It was as though the lives of men should be
Set circle-wise, whereof one little span
Through which all passed was blackened with
 the wing
Of perilous evil, bateless misery.
But all beyond, making the whole complete
O'er which the travelling feet
Of every man
Made way or ever he might come to death,
Was odorous with the breath
Of honey-laden flowers, and alive
With sacrificial ministrations sweet
Of man to man, and swift and holy loves,

And large heroic hopes, whereby should thrive
Man's spirit as he moves
From dawn of life to the great dawn of death.

It was as though mine eyes were set alone
Upon that woeful passage of despair,
Until I held that life had never known
Dominion but in this most troubled place
Where many a ruined grace
And many a friendless care
Ran to and fro in sorrowful unrest.
Still in my hand I pressed
Hope's fragile chalice, whence I drew deep draughts
That built belief that even yet should grow
Out of this dread confusion, as of broken crafts
Driven along ungovernable seas,
Some threads of order, and that I should know
After long vigil all the mysteries
Of human wonder and of human fate.

O fool, O only great
In pride unhallowed, O most blind of heart !
Confusion but more dark confusion bred,
Grief nurtured grief, I cried aloud and said,
'Through trackless ways the soul of man is
hurled,
No sign upon the forehead of the skies,
No beacon, and no chart
Are given to him, and the inscrutable world
But mocks his scars and fills his mouth with dust.'

*And lies bore lies
And lust bore lust,
And the world was heavy with flowerless rods,
And pride outran
The strength of a man
Who had set himself in the place of gods.*

IV

Soon was I then to gather bitter shame
Of spirit, I had been most wildly proud—
Yet in my pride had been
Some little courage, formless as a cloud,
Unpiloted save by the vagrant wind,
But still an earnest of the bonds that tame
The legionary hates, of sacred loves that lean
From the high soul of man towards his kind.
And all my grief
Had been for those I watched go to and fro
In uncompassioned woe
Along that little span my unbelief
Had fashioned in my vision as all life.
Now even this so little virtue waned,
For I became caught up into the strife
That I had pitied, and my soul was stained
At last by that most venomous despair,
Self-pity.

I no longer was aware
Of any will to heal the world's unrest,

I suffered as it suffered, and I grew
Troubled in all my daily trafficking,
Not with the large heroic trouble known
By proud adventurous men who would atone
With their own passionate pity for the sting
And anguish of a world of peril and snares,
It was the trouble of a soul in thrall
To mean despairs,
Driven about a waste where neither fall
Of words from lips of love, nor consolation
Of grave eyes comforting, nor ministration
Of hand or heart could pierce the deadly wall
Of self—of self,—I was a living shame—
A broken purpose. I had stood apart
With pride rebellious and defiant heart,
And now my pride had perished in the flame.
I cried for succour as a little child
Might supplicate whose days are undefiled,—
For tutored pride and innocence are one.

*To the gloom has won
A gleam of the sun
And into the barren desolate ways
A scent is blown
As of meadows mown
By cooling rivers in clover days.*

V

I turned me from that place in humble wise,
And fingers soft were laid upon mine eyes,
And I beheld the fruitful earth, with store
Of odorous treasure, full and golden grain,
Ripe orchard bounty, slender stalks that bore
Their flowered beauty with a meek content,
The prosperous leaves that loved the sun and rain,
Shy creatures unproved that came and went
In garrulous joy among the fostering green.
And, over all, the changes of the day
And ordered year their mutable glory laid—
Expectant winter soberly arrayed,
The prudent diligent spring whose eyes have seen
The beauty of the roses uncreate,
Imperial June, magnificent, elate
Beholding all the ripening loves that stray
Among her blossoms, and the golden time
Of the full ear and bounty of the boughs,—
And the great hills and solemn chanting seas
And prodigal meadows, answering to the chime
Of God's good year, and bearing on their brows
The glory of processional mysteries
From dawn to dawn, the woven shadow and shine
Of the high noon, the twilight secrecies,
And the inscrutable wonder of the stars
Flung out along the reaches of the night.

*And the ancient might
Of the binding bars
Waned as I woke to a new desire
For the choric song
Of exultant, strong
Earth-passionate men with souls of fire.*

VI

'Twas given me to hear. As I beheld—
With a new wisdom, tranquil, asking not
For mystic revelation—this glory long forgot,
This re-discovered triumph of the earth
In high creative will and beauty's pride
Establishéd beyond the assaulting years,
It came to me, a music that compelled
Surrender of all tributary fears,
Full-throated, fierce, and rhythmic with the wide
Beat of the pilgrim winds and labouring seas,
Sent up from all the harbouring ways of earth
Wherein the travelling feet of men have trod,
Mounting the firmamental silences
And challenging the golden gates of God.

*We bear the burden of the years
Clean limbed, clear hearted, open browed,
Albeit sacramental tears
Have dimmed our eyes, we know the proud*

*Content of men who sweep unbowed
Before the legionary fears ;
In sorrow we have grown to be
The masters of adversity.*

*Long ere from immanent silence leapt
Obedient hands and fashioning will,
The giant god within us slept,
And dreamt of seasons to fulfil
The shaping of our souls that still
Expectant earthward vigil kept,
Our wisdom grew from secrets drawn
From that far-off dim-memoried dawn.*

*Wise of the storied ages we,
Of perils dared and crosses borne,
Of heroes bound by no decree
Of laws defiled or faiths outworn,
Of poets who have held in scorn
All mean and tyrannous things that be ;
We prophesy with lips that sped
The songs of the prophetic dead.*

*Wise of the brief belovèd span
Of this our glad earth-travelling,
Of beauty's bloom and ordered plan,
Of love and love's compassioning,
Of all the dear delights that spring
From man's communion with man ;
We cherish every hour that strays
Adown the cataract of the days.*

*We see the clear untroubled skies
We see the glory of the rose
And laugh, nor grieve that clouds will rise
And wax with every wind that blows,
Nor that the blossoming time will close,
For beauty seen of humble eyes
Immortal habitation has
Though beauty's form may pale and pass.*

*Wise of the great unshapen age,
To which we move with measured tread
All girt with passionate truth to wage
High battle for the word unsaid,
The song unsung, the cause unled,
The freedom that no hope can gauge ;
Strong-armed, sure-footed, iron-willed
We sift and weave, we break and build.*

*Into one hour we gather all
The years gone down, the years unwrought,
Upon our ears brave measures fall
Across uncharted spaces brought,
Upon our lips the words are caught
Wherewith the dead the unborn call ;
From love to love, from height to height
We press and none may curb our might.*

VII

O blessèd voices, O compassionate hands,
Calling and healing, O great-hearted brothers !
I come to you. Ring out across the lands
Your benediction, and I too will sing
With you, and haply kindle in another's
Dark desolate hour the flame you stirred in me.
O bountiful earth, in adoration meet
I bow to you ; O glory of years to be,
I too will labour to your fashioning.
Go down, go down, unweariable feet,
Together we will march towards the ways
Wherein the marshalled hosts of morning wait
In sleepless watch, with banners wide unfurled
Across the skies in ceremonial state,
To greet the men who lived triumphant days,
And stormed the secret beauty of the world.

EPILOGUE FOR A MASQUE

A little time they lived again, and lo !
Back to the quiet night the shadows go,
And the great folds of silence once again
Are over fools and kings and fighting-men.

A little while they went with stumbling feet,
With spears of hate, and love all flowery sweet,
With wondering hearts and bright adventurous
wills,
And now their dust is on a thousand hills.

We dream of them, as men unborn shall dream
Of us, who strive a little with the stream
Before we too go out beyond the day,
And are as much a memory as they.

And Death, so coming, shall not seem a thing
Of any fear, nor terrible his wing.
We too shall be a tale on earth, and time
Our pilgrimage shall shape into a rhyme.

With coloured threads of laughter and of tears
They wove a pattern on the crowded years,
And wove aright, and we are weaving still
From dawn to dusk—God grant we weave not ill.

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